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Using Gender Knowledge to Prepare for Secondary School
Leadership as a Principal

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What most got in the way of my doing the kind of job I wanted to do was my insecurity It stemmed from the narrow way women's roles were defined. Katherine Graham (1997, p.416)

Although Katherine Graham, Publisher of the Washington Post, was describing her feelings as a woman in the male-dominated world of newspaper publishing in the late 1960s, the same feelings are being experienced by females who are considering entering careers as secondary principals today. Each of the women who have been a part of this research entered a course on the secondary principalship unsure about a future career beyond that of teacher. They had not entered the educational administration program seeking to prepare for the principalship, but rather because of their need to meet school district tenure requirements. Neither had they ever participated in any form of career planning, examined beliefs and assumptions about leadership nor considered the effect of their gender upon career aspirations.

Evidence that females in education and particularly those in leadership positions did not develop a career plan exists. This lack of planning limits career movement (Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Ozga, 1993). Not planning for a career can seriously limit personal views about role dimensions and the mental images held about one's place in the setting. Creating a view of self can build ownership of

the role. Identification of self in a career role "helps build confidence and establishes effective strategies for responding to new responsibilities" (Crow & Glascock, 1995, 23). Being able to establish and communicate a personal perspective on a career role sets in one's mind a future direction. Using this foundation, personal awareness of organizational barriers, knowledge and skill needs unique to the individual's future can be identified. Participation in a career development planning process assisted female students in reconceptualizing themselves moving from the role of teacher to that of principal.

The career development planning process within which the female students studied in this research participated included the development of an "Educational Leadership Platform" as the foundation of the student's plan (Barnett, 1991; Barnett & Brill, 1989; Kottkamp, 1990). The elements of the Plan included the construction of a leadership definition, recognition of personal and organizational-- external-- barriers (Ferguson, 1984) which limit career movement and strategies to deal with barriers as well as those which could be used to assure accomplishment of the Plan. Throughout the Plan development process, gender differences were recognized and a gender based world view known to females was affirmed and valued (Alley & MacDonald, 1996).

Participating in the career development process facilitated female students in examining the gender filters

they would encounter in a future career as a secondary school principal (Rusch & Marshall, 1996). When supported in the examination of a future career by a female instructor who had been a principal for fourteen years, gender filters and strategies to deal with the organization could be openly discussed and examined.

Educational Administration Programs and Career Development

Efforts are being expended to assure that students have access to a theoretically based curriculum within which content is congruent with practice (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1993; Interstate School Licensure Consortium, 1995). Although Donald and Sally Clark (1996) have recommended that attention should be directed toward meeting the particular needs of women in preservice educational administration programs, focused attention to career planning processes has not been specifically addressed. Instead, performance standards and leadership expectations are presented generically with little attention being given to the gender differences and the resulting perceptions about leadership roles and specifically the role of the secondary school principal. The inclusion of career development planning processes within the educational administration curriculum could serve as a means of addressing these differences. Female students should be provided with a framework and process within which they can

construct a personal leadership theory that can serve as a framework through which leadership behaviors can be manifested (Walker, 1995, p. 171).

Since the majority of secondary schools continues to follow very traditionally structured program patterns, one can assume that the bureaucracy has within its structure a continuing support for maintaining traditional gender stereotypes about roles and behaviors. Because of the number of extracurricular activities requiring student supervision, The work ethic expected of the secondary principal not only influences hiring decisions but also application decisions, especially for women with children. These demands on time also adversely influences their decision to pursue a career as a secondary principal. The perceptions about strength and power as tools of student control and discipline place women at a disadvantage because of perceptions of strength needed to maintain order. Each of these become issues which female students grapple with as they make decisions about whether or not to pursue a career in the principalship.

The female students struggle with finding a means to incorporate feminine nurturing needs so characteristic of teaching into the organizational expectations held for performance as a principal. This is an important issue that female students need to undertake in order to present leadership that nurtures children and teachers into becoming "caring, moral productive members of society" (Marshall, et. al., 1996, p. 272). During the career development planning

process, the instructor/research has observed female student resolving the issue as they develop understanding of their female self and then use this self-knowledge to reframe assumptions about leadership roles and behaviors. They are able to construct a meaning of leadership and identify behaviors that are gender specific but yet support leadership behaviors within the secondary school.

The Secondary School and Gender Perceptions of a Career as Principal

The structure of the secondary school emphasizes linear programming defined within narrow curriculum bands, where the rules of the discipline code build student behavior guidelines and where the exercise of rules and regulations (Ferguson, 1984) limit personal decision making and choices. The power and control issues raised by these have created a view of the secondary principalship that female students find unappealing. Based on their experiences as teachers, they not only do not believe they could act as principal, they are not sure that they are capable of performing within the role. These perceptions coupled with the accepted belief that only males are suited for high school principalships are lens through which female students view a career in this field.

Based on personal experiences in schools and little or no contact with a female secondary principal, assumptions about the role and leadership behaviors have been adopted

and reflect teacher-principal relationships which do not acknowledge gender differences. They have experienced little appreciation of and recognition for the uniqueness of female leadership. When such assumptions are affirmed through experiences as teachers within the authority structure of the school setting, the personal reality of leadership as a principal for female students must be constructed.

Internal barriers influence female career direction and keep them from pursuing secondary school principalships. Failure to understand the barriers and to develop strategies for coping with barriers produces stress in females (Gutek, 1983). Having viewed only male principals exercising power and authority and realizing that one would not only have power but be expected to act as if powerful, confuses female students. The female view of power learned as a teacher, its meaning and use in the classroom is not always congruent with what they observe in the male principal. This perception exists in spite of the exercise of power with peers, within union activities and in the classroom. During discussions in the career planning process, the students recognize that the principal's power is integrated into rule and procedure compliance and not the power gained from nurturing individuals. Power is perceived as being used to meet organizational demands rather than those of the humans who make the organization function.

Since women experience their social worlds differently than men (Ferguson, 1984), questions about power, its purpose

and use calls for answers and new definitions. Within the career development planning process, permission is given to female students to search for and develop a definition of power that is supportive of the female's world and to determine behaviors congruent with the definition that will support them in the role of the principalship.

At issue for the female students is determining who they want to be as a principal, when they want it, and what price they would be willing to pay to achieve a career as a secondary school principal. They need assistance in developing self knowledge that will help them "get in touch" with a personal definition of leadership and then support to enable them to work through strategies whereby they can apply and act on the definitions within a school setting.

Despite increases in the number of female students in educational administration courses, dramatic increase in the number of female students entering the secondary school as either principals or assistant principals is not occurring in Ohio. From 1993 to 1996 the number increased by only 5.2%, this in a state with potential of 1560 positions. Has the lack of gender appropriate support for career development limited the efforts of females in pursuing a career as secondary principal? It is the position of the instructor/researcher that the leadership potential of female students can be developed and supported through the inclusion of a career development planning process into educational administration programs.

Learning to recognize and identify variations in leadership due to gender, and to understand that one can plan for a career as a secondary administrator that follows a different road (Gutek & Larwood, 1987) than that of their male is important. Helping female students realize that such a career can become a reality is ultimately about developing a perspective that, whether male or female, differences should be recognized and the schools should find means to flexibly honor both.

A Career Development Planning Process: The Research Design

In the introduction to her text, Getting Smart, Lather (1991) recommends that "better ways of examining 'otherness' and the relationship between 'self' and 'other' are increasingly central to feminism...."(p.xviii). She directs attention to the need for research that empowers those involved to change and that supports self reflection and the development of deeper understanding by the subjects of the research. The mutual reciprocity and the interactivity implied by Lather has been and will continue to be an integral part of this research.

This research did not originate as a planned project but rather evolved over time as the instructor/researcher continue to communicate and support with the female students. Being female and having experienced the dilemmas which these students were encountering, provided an opening for future

discussions. With each year of implementation of the career development planning process in the secondary principalship course, the number of female student grew. From 1990-1995, 42 female students participated. Twenty-six students remain as part of the research.

Stages through which this research has grown follow:

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 1990: | First implementation of career development planning process. |
| 1991 & 1992: | Informal conversations with students. Particular attention was given to those who had completed certification and were searching for a first position. |
| 1993: | Student survey. Retrospective view of process value. (Alley, Conners, & Stanley, 1993). |
| 1993& 1994: | Individual student interviews to ascertain career progress and use of plan. Research question: Is a career development planning process valued by female students? If so, what is its particular value? (Alley & MacDonald, 1996). |
| 1995 & 1996: | Individual student contact and interviews. Focus group interviews. Second researcher joined project and began conducting reflective interviews with the instructor/researcher. |
| 1996 & 1997: | Original career development plan documents returned to students for review and comments. Research questions: At this point in your career, where are you in your plan? Is your plan still working? What have you changed? Why? (26 students remain in the study.) |

Based on the reflective discourse of the female students as they attempt to move career-wise from the classroom teacher to principal, the researchers initially sought answers to the following questions:

1. Could a career planning process assist female students to develop a definitive view of themselves as secondary principals?
2. If so, how would these students continue to make use of the process after completion of the course?
3. What have been the outcomes?

As the data was examined, a second set of questions emerged: How do these students perceive a career as secondary principal? Has their view of the principals changed? What is the basis for their view of a leadership role? Are these women more aware of what the cost of a career in educational administration will be? Have they made adjustments because of this knowledge?

Using the self-knowledge of these female students, the researchers are seeking to determine if these females have attempted to re-define the role of the principal and if so in what fashion. How have they constructed their leadership roles? What is the status of the "meaning-making" or truth (Lamberg, 1995) developed as a female student engaged in creating a career development plan?

Status of the Research: Findings and Implications

Since the career planning process implementation in 1990, The researcher/instructor has attempted to maintain contact with 42 female students who have been enrolled in the secondary principalship course through 1995. Currently, 26

students remain as subjects of this research. Demographic information for selected students are presented in Table 1. Continuing uses of the career development plan by this group of former students are reported in Table 2. The next step in career development is presented in Table 3.

This information is interesting and informative but what the researchers have begun to develop are profiles of career directions and cognitive maps of each of the 26 female students remaining in the study. For each of the maps we have determined a motto which is viewed as being congruent with the individual's definition of self, a central theme running through their reflections. We believe that the emerging maps are an apt means of providing pictorial descriptions of the individual's beliefs, assumptions and behaviors.

The creation of personal meaning in a future career as principal is still being acted upon. What we have also discovered is that for these individuals the world view they created as part of the career development plan is consistent with the world they are attempting to re-create as a principal within their school. Examples of three cognitive maps are included with this paper: 1. Personal values and beliefs influencing behaviors in the principalship; 2. View of self as a principal; and 3. Projecting leadership as a principal.

A profile of one of these female students, Roan, follows.

Roan: From Teacher to Principal

When Roan entered the secondary principalship course, she saw herself becoming a supervisor in the adult education department of her district. (See Table 5) She was a vocational teacher and was exercising management skills as a "customized training director" responsible for developing and supervising contract training programs within the vocational school. She was also assisting the principal in disciplining special needs students enrolled in the school's horticulture program.

The following year, the principal of the vocational school took an extended leave for medical reasons and still without certification as a principal, Roan was asked to become acting assistant principal, assuming all of the absent principal's responsibility. Roan came to the instructor/researcher to discuss the role, its responsibilities and how to react to perceptions held by others about her behavior should she accept the temporary assignment. Frequently, she asked, "What would you do if.....?" Probing, testing, asking for support. In her career plan she had stated that she was "reluctant to apply for a principalship in her own district" and now she was faced with having to struggle with a dilemma: To accept the offer and have an opportunity to test her construction of leadership or to refuse and wait until certification to move

ahead. She was having to deal with preconceived impressions about the school, its teachers and students, a concern she had identified within her career plan.

During the decision making process, we had multiple dialogues. Questions about the role, how to deal with the all male secondary administrators in the district, how to deal with recalcitrant teachers and other teacher difficulties as they arose. Even such topics as meeting behavior came under scrutiny. In each discussion, Roan's interest focused on developing strategies that would allow her to be true to herself while acting in the reality of the role. Finally, the day came and she made her decision. In reality, the decision grew through the discussions as she became more assured in her ability to act based on knowledge of herself.

Roan stepped into the position, thinking that it would be temporary. As her confidence grew so too did respect for her grow within the district office. When the principalship of the vocational school officially opened, it was offered to her and she accepted. During her tenure as principal, she has initiated changes in school structure including block scheduling, dealt with program and staff reductions and disciplined those teachers that were not acting "professionally." Roan has acted on her belief that as a principal she should be a role model (See Map 1).

In Roan's school district, every high school principal for the last 15 years has been "home-grown" and frequently

risen to principal from teacher in the same building. Currently, Roan is the only female secondary principal within the district and was just assigned (February, 1997) to the role of high school principal on the west side of this urban community.

Because the district has been identified as academically and financially deficient, it is currently being audited by the Ohio State Department of Education and is in risk of being administered under state control. In December, a "hands-off", autocratic superintendent retired but Roan's new appointment was supported by the acting superintendent. At the time of this paper, the status of a new superintendent is "in limbo." Even though the district's school board has identified a candidate for the superintendency, final decisions for this position cannot be made without state approval. Decisions regarding school closings and teacher/administrator reduction-in-force are also pending state approval. The effect of these on Roan's new school is not known.

Roan's new school is the only one of four high schools in the city that has a majority of white students. State proficiency test passage rates are the highest in the city as is student attendance. With many schools in this district having mobility rates above or near 100%, the school's mobility rate is the lowest in the district. Roan's new school as viewed as **The High School** in the district.

In this urban district, the teacher's union contract contains a bidding process for teacher building transfers. High school teachers strategize and plan to move to this building. Identification as a teacher in this high school is important for status but also because it is closest to the "safe" suburbs. Teachers perceive themselves as being able to teach content with students who are willing to learn and who have supportive parents. They discuss their "good" students and pride themselves at not having to deal with "those problems" (race and gangs) that the "other teachers have to deal with."

In her new position, Roan is having to re-consider her leadership within a new context. Instead of dealing with urban inner city problems of poverty, gangs and violence, she now finds herself having to learn about teachers, teaching strategies and academic student programs. The issues of power are not safety and security but learning and teaching. She recognizes the different standards and expectations created by the setting of the new school. Even though this is not her first principalship, the differences in the culture of the setting is driving her to examine herself and her platform to determine if she can continue to be "true to herself." Her first hand experiences as principal has demonstrated the reality of the difficulties in the role of principal. As a leader, she is continuing to follow the plan she identified during the career development process.

Lately, our conversations have focused on answering these questions: How can I change my strategies? What strategies need to be change? But yet she holds to what she has defined as important.

At this paper, she has already begun to act to reconstruct the meaning of leadership within the new school. She would admit that she is not sure where her behaviors will lead. However, teachers are talking with dis-belief about Roan's visibility in the school. She writes letters of recognition and notes of supports to the teachers. She has also begun to slip articles about teaching in various content areas into the teachers' mailboxes. Students are noticing Roan as well. She is in the halls during passing periods, greets the students when they enter the school and talks to them during their lunch.

Roan does have one major concern. A major barrier to her reconstruction may be the union contract. In her previous school, she learned to use her personal power to influence teacher change. Her future efforts are grounded in her developed personal view of the principalship. We believe she will continue to use her personal power.

Through her participation in the career development planning process, Roan constructed personal meaning about the principalship. Based on this meaning, she is currently engaged in re-negotiating the strategies and behaviors that she will use to perform in that role. Congruency between

assumptions, beliefs and behavior still are an important component of Roan's leadership as a high school principal.

Conclusion

Through participation in a career development planning process, female students have examined leadership behaviors, power relationships and organizational roles, selecting those that will "fit" and those that can be strategically adapted to use within the principalship. The process of developing a new view of "self" as principal helped build a bridge from teacher to principal and does set in motion changes in career expectations.

The inclusion of a career development planning process within a course on the secondary principalship provided the researcher/instructor with a beginning from which information and understanding, the pattern and meaning (Lather, 1991, p. 72) of a career as a principal for females can be identified. This research will continue seeking answers to the questions How can women be assisted in creating themselves in the role of principal differently than males? Can they be prepared to act on their creations? The researchers will continue to observe, interview and follow these women as they define their lives and mediate their leadership roles within the school settings.

The research will provide opportunities for continuing support for the females, opening windows of opportunity for

future dialogues. Through this research, we are attempting to focus on the "fault line" of these women through their experiences in "a landscape dominated by a culture of privileged white male leadership which sets the standards and norms" (Gossetti & Rusch, 1995, p. 15).

TABLE 5. Profile of Female Student: Roan

Family: Married, two children, youngest graduating from high school in 1997. Believes in separating responsibilities of work from those of the home.

Spring, 1992

Enrollment in Secondary School Principalship Course.

Position at time of course: Customized Training Coordinator in Vocational Center.

Spring, 1993.

Secondary School Principalship Certification

Position at time of certification: Acting Assistant Principal, Vocational School. (No principal appointed.).

Fall, 1993--February, 1997

Vocational school principal. (No assistant principal)

Spring, 1996

Entered Doctoral Program in Educational Administration

Summer, 1996

First publication in professional journal.

February, 1997

Appointed high school principal.

Responsibilities: Master schedule

Daily operation of high school

Second publication in professional journal.

Summer, 1997

Completion of doctoral program.

Future:

Teach in higher education.

TABLE 1. Demographics of Career Development of Selected Interviewees, 1996

STUDENT	CURRENT POSITION	COMMUNITY TYPE	PREVIOUS POSITION(S)	CAREER DIRECTION SINCE CLASS
Diane*	None	Urban	None	Looked for teaching position in order to qualify for certification. Currently GA while working on PhD
Joan*	HS Ass't. Principal	Suburban/Urban	Social Studies Teacher/ Coach	From business teacher/coach to HS Assistant Principal to HS Principal
Julie**	HS Ass't Principal	Urban	HS Dean of Students	Position title and role change upon certification: Dean of Students to Assistant Principal
Laverne**	HS Ass't Principal	Urban	HS Counselor/Coach	From physical education teacher to counselor and summer school principal to HS principal
Linda*	Director, Voc. Ed.	Rural/Suburban	HS Department Head	From vocational/business teacher to department chair to District Director of Vocational Education
Mary Ann	Head, Dist. Learning Ctr.; School Board	Urban	Language Arts Consultant	From school board member to president of the school board to Director, District Learning Center
Roan*	HS Principal	Urban	Vocational/Business Teacher	From vocational/business teacher to acting Assistant Principal, Vocational School, to Principal, Vocational School

Note: All have masters and certification in the secondary school principalship.

*Currently pursuing EdD/PhD

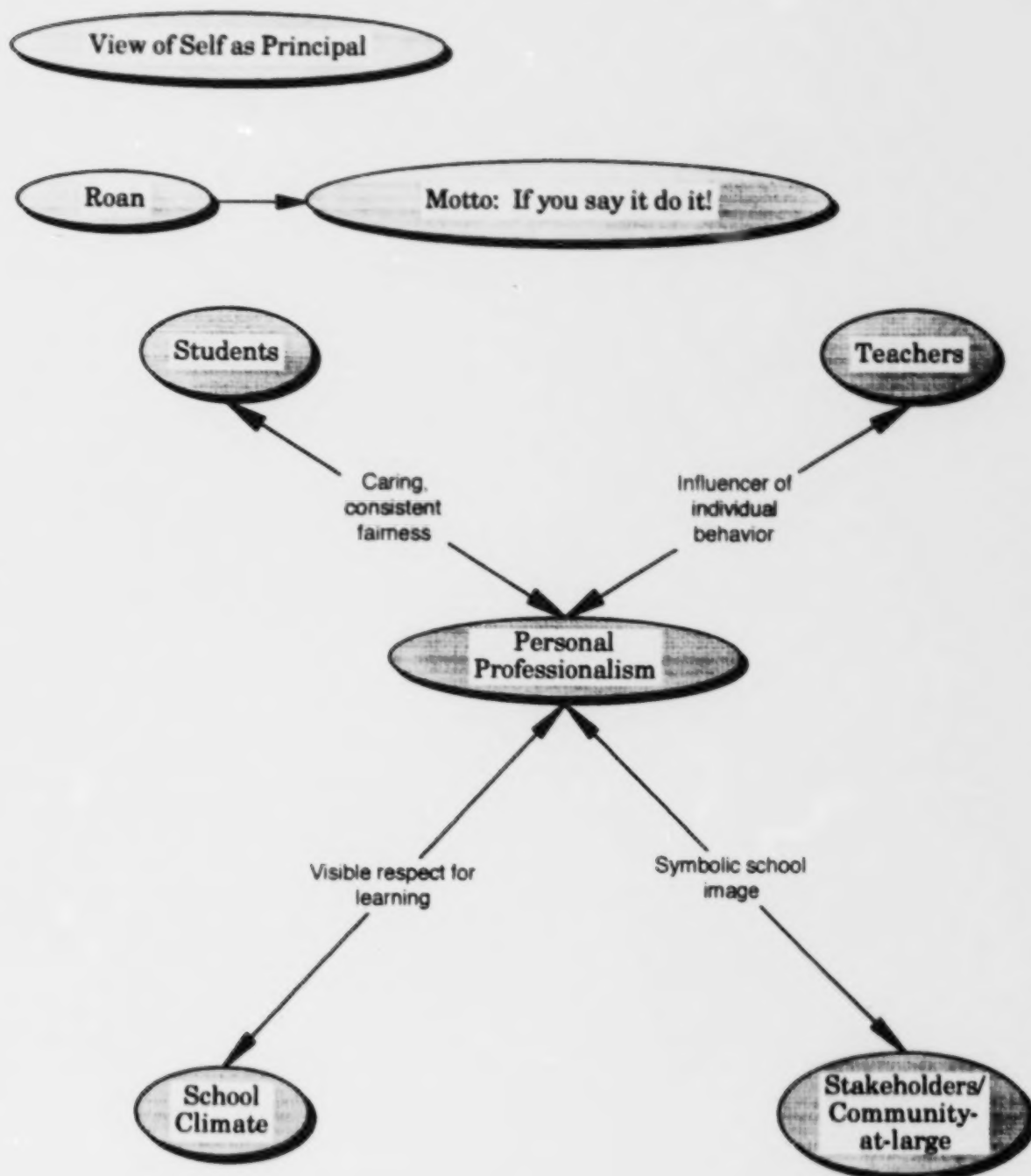
**Will probably retire before principalship opens

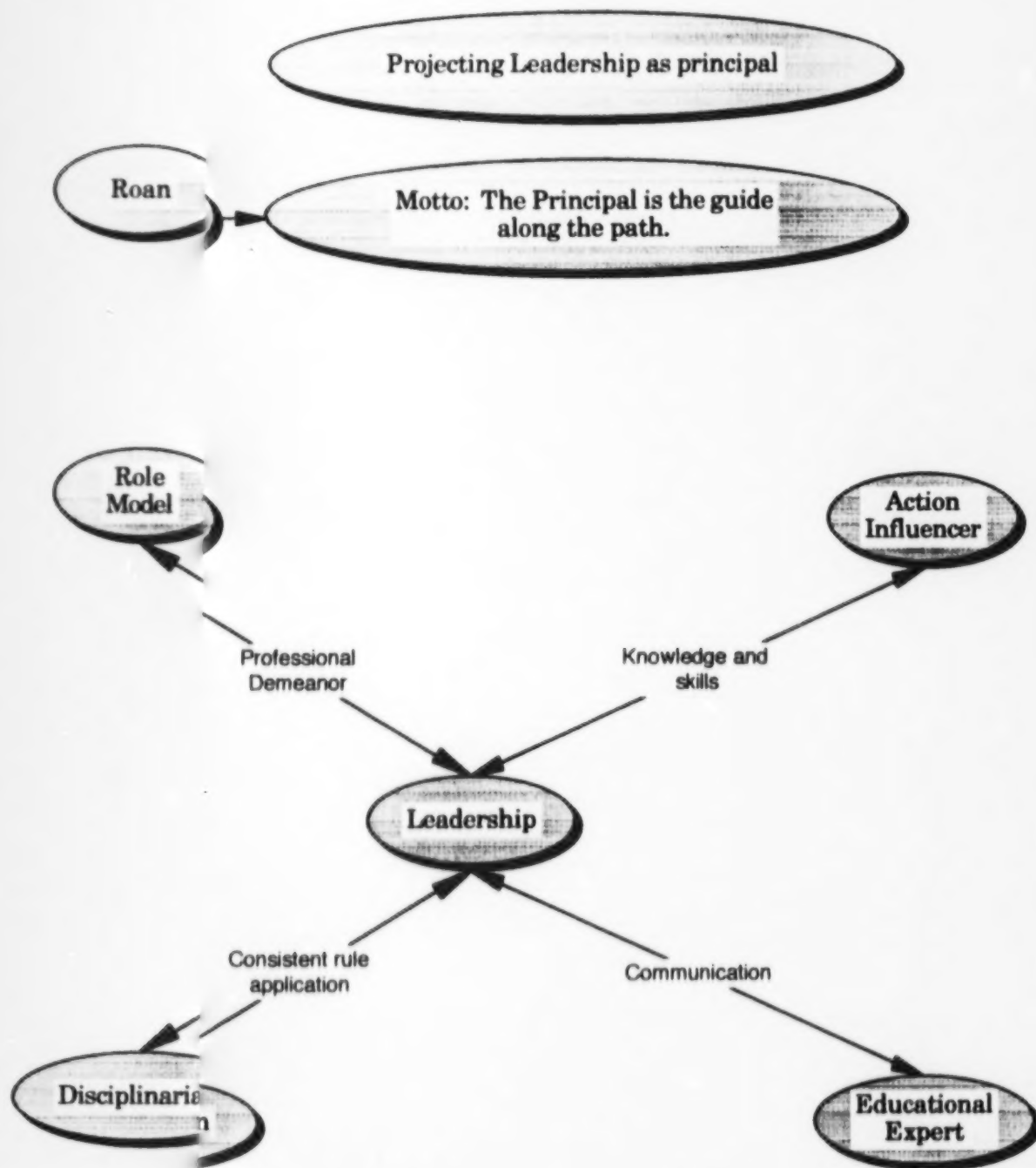
TABLE 2. Responses of Selected Interviewees, 1996: Use of the Platform and Plan

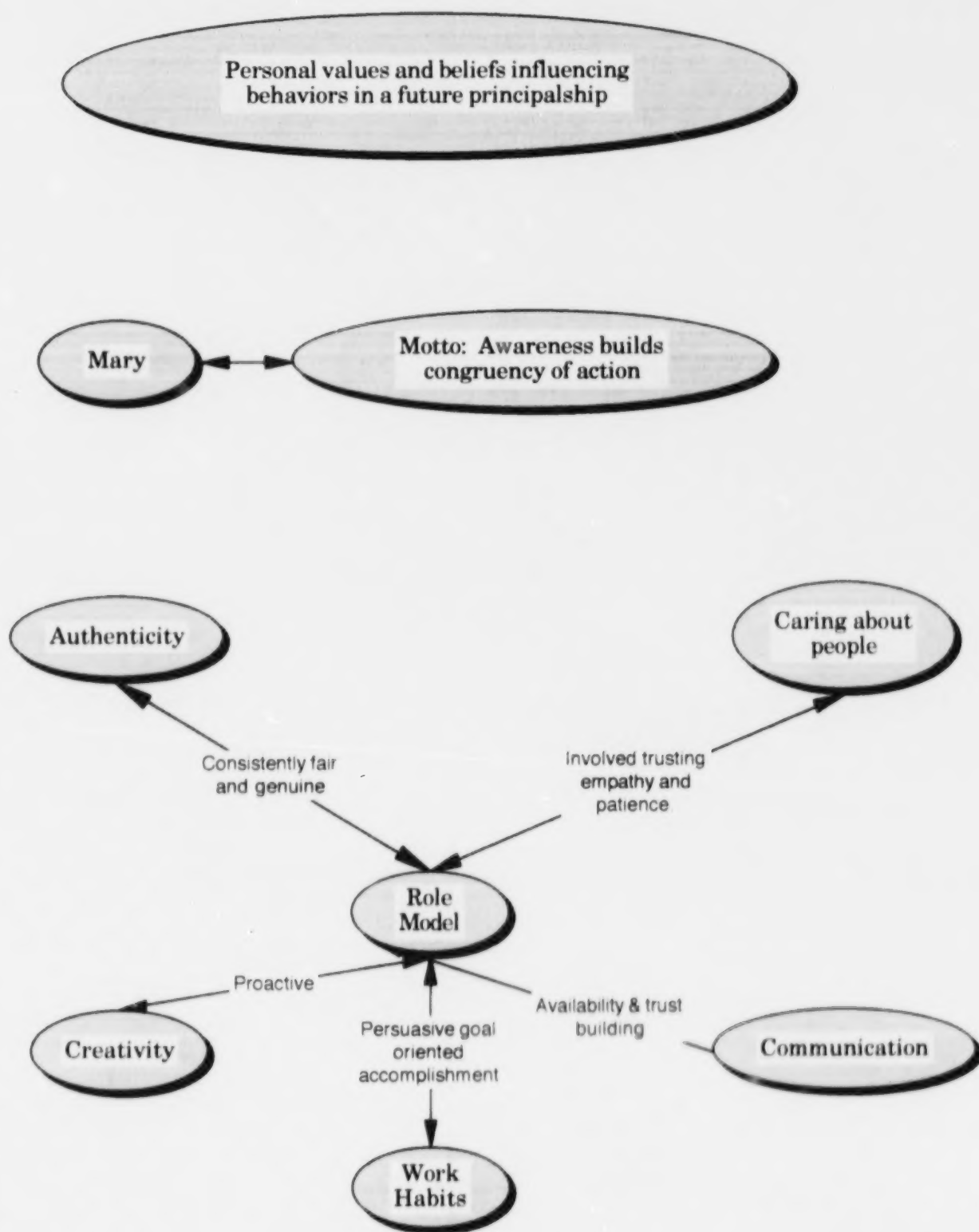
STUDENT	IN POSITION SEARCH?	PROBLEM-SOLVING TOOL?	CLARIFIED ROLE OF PRINCIPAL?
Diane	Hasn't searched for an administrative position yet, but has applied for a teaching position	No opportunity, but I have all my materials and plan to use them!	Realized importance of getting a teaching position so could become principal.
Joan	Preparation for interview	Reviewed and extended through interview process	Affirmed belief that she could become principal
Julie	Has not really searched for a position; did not have to apply nor interview for current position	No comment	No. Became an assistant principal; role is so different; recommends preparation for assistant principal position; teacher leadership roles and current principal have helped
Laverne	Same as above	Used for focusing on things she wants to achieve and for looking at weaknesses	Agreed with above
Linda			
Mary Ann	Appreciates the document--helps you think globally, "Where do I want to go?"	Wants to know rationale, cause and effect	Ultimate goal is to do what is best for children in school
Roan	"I would revisit mine (platform/plan)." Use as assessment of all successes; sit down with it before interview; be able to articulate "how I see myself in that role"; reflective tool in looking at others	Values careful decision-making; used to be a quick decision-maker, rely on instincts, but now tries to think about something a lot longer	Helped her articulate what she was going to be; "I don't think I will ever apply for a job again without doing serious research"

TABLE3. Responses of Interviewees, 1996: "The Next Step"-- Career Goals and Connections

STUDENT	THE NEXT STEP: CAREER GOALS AND CONNECTIONS
Diane	N/A
Joan	I know I will be principal. Having a doctorate will give me an edge.
Julie	Would like to be principal of MS; doesn't think she can become HS principal because district already has "two white women; have to be realistic"
Laverne	Wants to be MS principal, principal of alternative school, director of pupil services, or director of athletics; in current position as assistant principal, the principal is helping to groom her and other two assistant principals for the principalship, in contrast with the experiences of others in her position; being given responsibilities beyond discipline--e.g., special projects, scheduling, things that are new and difficult
Linda	I will have to look for principalship beyond my district. That is clear.
Laverne	I may never pursue a principalship before I retire.
Roan	I like being principal and do not foresee changing schools.







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